THE FRONTIER

A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE COMMON LIFE

EDITED BY
PHILIP MAIRET AND ALEC VIDLER

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MARCH 1951
Vol. II No. 3

A PLEA FOR ECONOMICS

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The Christian Frontier Council will welcome readers of *The Frontier* and their friends at a

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at the Royal Empire Society, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2, on Wednesday, April 4th, 1951, at 12.45 p.m. A talk will be given by Sir Arthur F. B. fforde, Head Master of Rugby School, on "Encounters with Doubt".

Tickets can be obtained (before March 31st) from the Christian Frontier, 8 The Cloisters, Windsor Castle. Please enclose remittance of 5s. per person with your application.

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OUR NEW CONTRIBUTORS this month are

DENYS MUNBY, who worked for some years in the East End of London and did a survey of industry in Stepney, is now Lecturer in Economics at Aberdeen University.

ALAN RICHARDSON, D.D., is a residentiary Canon of Durham Cathedral, and was formerly Study Secretary of the Student Christian Movement. He is the Chairman of the Bible Commission of the Study Department of the World Council of Churches. His books include *Christian Apologetics*, Preface to *Bible-Study*, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels*, etc.

THE
FRONTIER
A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE COMMON LIFE

Vol. II. No. 3. MARCH 1951

Monthly Letter

AFTER a long winter of discontent on the part of Christian social thinkers, with Political Economy and all its works, we are not surprised to receive such an outburst as the one we publish this month. A young economist blushes for his fellow-Christians and somewhat warmly appeals to them to take care lest they be found bringing the Gospel into contempt by saying foolish things about a subject of which they know too little. His protest is partly a criticism of some editorial observations made in this journal last year: but we welcome his contribution, not to defend what appeared in these pages (on which others may have something to say later) but upon the merits of the article and because the topic is timely. The no-man's-land between the Christian message and economic science has been a scene of confusions, giving rise to a growing uneasiness on both sides for many years. The whole question about the place of the economist in Christian controversy became inescapable from the moment that forward-looking religious spirits began seriously to try to apply principles of Christian action to modern social and economic practice. Their incursion into the realms of economic and financial policy aroused very heated controversy which has by no means wholly died down; and we only take the risk of stirring the embers because the problems that Mr. Munby proposes for study by Christian groups seem to us well

worth their attention. For what we shall say in recommendation we plead for tolerance, well aware that this is fiercely debatable ground.

But first we would draw attention to another article in this number, on a deeper and more intimate aspect of man's working life. Dr. Alan Richardson's summary of the Biblical Doctrine of Work is published here, by the courtesy of the World Council of Churches Study Department. This Doctrine is directed to the ends and not much to the means, of the economic life: here, as in every social activity, the Christian concern is above all with the effects of the action upon the agent, with the producer himself, and only with the product so far as it affects his capacity for a life beyond life. Here is the outline of the profound if relatively simple doctrine that we have to relate, in action, to the vast complex of issues that we call economics.

Economists and Christians

Our contributor Mr. Munby's "Plea for Economics" is not intended, evidently, as a defence of the "old economics" of the world-market and free competitive enterprise, which was the object of so much of the criticism and denunciation from Christian sociologists that he deplores. He is commending study of the new principles of monopoly, as well as of competition. But he thinks that the reaction against finance and the market-economy was indiscriminate amongst those he is admonishing, and doubtless it sometimes was, though such thinkers were relatively few; many more are to be found at the opposite extreme. Recent enquiries in the U.S.A., for instance, made by the American churches, suggest that most of their influential members tend actually to identify Christian socialist order with the capitalist and free enterprise tradition of economics. This is a misconception of the historic facts, if an understandable one. Nothing like this economics was either the theory or the practice of Christian countries

until modern times. The movement that produced it, in which Adam Smith was such a creative mind, arose after the disruption of the internationalism in which the Church had been the predominant factor. Exchange for mutual profit was thenceforth the only obvious basis of intercourse between nations; and it is a strong basis. As we see to-day, even in a world divided between violently contradictory ideologies to the point of "cold war", trade still goes on, if rather lamely, to mutual benefit. Modern economics has been partly a scientific movement, a study of this existing, mutually helpful activity in and between societies, in order to promote and improve it.

The Ethics of Exchange

But the economic movement did spring also from Christian ideas, motives and judgments—those of individual freedom of choice, for instance, and of just reward. Too much disrespect has been paid to its acceptance of the motives of profit and self-interest, which in this sphere of human living have some undeniable rights to recognition. Exchange of goods, and the complex business by which it is effected, is an activity that can become degraded like any other. But far from being immoral in tendency, is it not arguable that the greatest single moral step-forward that mankind ever made was the discovery of the economic motive?—that first grey dawn, in the primitive mind, of the idea that if we want something in another's possession, we may, if it is "surplus" to him, persuade him to give it to us in exchange for something equally surplus to ourselves. We need not knock him on the head and take it. We may effect the deal in a friendly spirit and enjoy the new property in a peace that is further secured by the knowledge that he too, is pacified by the gain. Is not exchange one essential bridge between animal and human nature: man's first experiment in doing to another as he would be done by, a timid venture towards the rule of law?

A Reasonable Reaction

Note, however, the timidity of the step, the comparative rarity of the achievement. To transact business across the frontiers of the tribe, to meet the alien in order to treat with him for mutual advantage and not to fight—this belongs to the sunnier side of man's experience rather than to his substantial life. It is a recognition of the darker, intractable side of things (which the economist is prone to forget) that leads some Christian thinkers, and those not the least well-informed, to urge the claims of a more "balanced" economy. In Britain's case this would mean less industry and more agriculture. After all there cannot be more reciprocal advantage to be gained by trading between peoples, than they have material surpluses and moral willingness for. If we try to exceed that amount, because of a liking for commerce or of vested interests in it, we may arouse suspicions, jealousies and resistances. The stimulation of exchange, which is peace-making up to a point, beyond that point can be a provocation to strife. And to-day, as our world grows more precarious, we see a resurgence of feeling in favour of an economy and civilization resting more solidly on its own earth. This reaction was familiar enough both in the last century and in earlier years of this century, and it colours the outlook of many practising Christians to-day, in circumstances a good deal more ominous. It is sometimes dismissed as mere bias, ignorance or refusal to think; but that it has some basis in *prima facie* fact is obvious. The real question is not whether these thinkers are refusing—as our contributor suggests—to face the economic problem, but whether economists are stating that problem in a way that ignores their essential position.

The World as One Concern

It may be said that their position is untenable in view of the realities of the modern world, of which one of the most obvious is the shrinkage of space. In our time as never

before, international communications have made the whole world almost into one functioning whole, in which we cannot hope to find our way by hints and clues gleaned from the study of the past history of smaller and relatively isolated states; we have to think on an altogether larger scale and in terms of more impersonal forces. The alleged "manageability" of the smaller human group may only mislead us whose task, whether we like it or not, is to try to manage the whole world. At least we have to live in working (or else warring) relations with every part of the globe. And of an infinitude of difficulties that beset this effort, there is one that is dominant, and is equally important from the economists' and from the Christian's point of view. It is very relevant to the case which our contributor and critic is arguing, and it arises straight out of what everyone must regard as a practical implication of the Christian view of God and humanity—i.e., the duty to recognize equally the claims of all the family of nations to that "place in the sun" for which the less wealthy peoples are insistently clamouring and, in many cases, industriously working. The new ideal of international equality requires, on our side, preparedness to have these poorer peoples competing with us commercially. And in this competition, general economic backwardness can confer an advantage.

The Advantage of Poverty

A simple if painful illustration may be drawn from current events to show how hard it its to argue away this—for us—obstinate and disturbing fact. In the Korean peninsula the Americans, who represent the world's highest "standard of living", are fighting Chinese who can be trained in the use of modern weapons without their standard of living being altered. The result is that, *so far as* there is equality of weapons, the more "backward" people stands to win. This point needs no elaboration. The weakness of the highly-civilized is in their *impedimenta*—the baggage trains loaded with the comforts of civilization that must

follow every advance and clog every withdrawal of an army, grow more cumbersome the higher the standard of convenience and service that its soldiers are accustomed to. And this handicap, an important factor in war, is even more important in the field of industrial competition. Given equally efficient tools and machinery, the workers who need little and work light have the competitive advantage in the world-market over those who have won their way to a more elaborate livelihood. The unequal contest must continue as long as there are differences in the social and cultural levels of nations whose industrial technique is being developed on identical principles. What then should we do, in order to work towards an approximate evenness of footing? Should we complicate the lives of the simple till they are more like ours; or should we ourselves strip to our task and simplify our demands? For the Western world, this economic question has become much more pressing since the two great wars.

Orthodox Economic Answer

Presumably, the answer is that we should take both courses at once, raising the living standards of the simple and simplifying our own. The latter is the morally difficult course, fallen human nature being what it is. But our economist contributor admits that there may be "a clear Christian case" for a deliberate reduction of our Western standard of living, with a return to more natural and fundamental occupations for a larger proportion of our people. And if, as we have just seen, there is also an economic necessity that we should thus partly de-industrialize and re-ruralize ourselves, the economists could point to their traditional method of doing it. Submit your businesses, they would say, to the free operation of the competitive price system in the open market of the world. From this winnowing force we—in Britain especially—are largely sheltered by the money clamped to foreign money systems; complex controls of imports and exports; taxes

The Christian Frontier Council is arranging another

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on Wednesday, 4th April, 1951, at the Royal Empire Society, Northumberland Avenue, London, W.C. 2, to which all readers and their friends are invited. A buffet lunch will be served from 12.45 p.m. during which they will have an opportunity to meet members of the Council and the Editors of *The Frontier*, and at 1.15 p.m. a talk will be given by

SIR ARTHUR FFORDE

on

"Encounters with Doubt"

This will be followed by discussion, and the meeting will be closed promptly at 2 p.m. The Chair will be taken by Mrs. Kathleen Bliss, D.D. Admission will be by ticket only, which must be obtained before April 2nd.

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that raise prices and subsidies that reduce them: but the economists have never really liked or believed in these devices, even when they condoned them as unavoidable. They argue, with whatever reservations, that if only these complications could be removed, the disparities between national standards of living would tend to even-out, if we simply let well alone (*laisser faire*). The lower-standard peoples, so far as they chose to become industrial, would undersell some of the manufactures of nations whose wage costs were higher; and the richer countries, thereby losing some of their foreign income, would become unable to buy abroad some of the things they needed, and would have to turn to home-grown substitutes. Such a development presupposes the fulfilment of other technical and financial conditions we cannot now go into. Perhaps above all it presupposes a readiness, on the part of both capital and labour, to accept some insecurity, some risk that their work may fail or be no longer needed, that they may suffer temporary loss or have to turn to another kind of work, perhaps less profitable.

The Trouble with Economics

Every economist is ruefully aware how seldom those conditions are fulfilled. Apart from natural accidents—famine, flood or even swiftly revolutionary alterations in productive technique—which can make strict economic law inapplicable to cases, economic exchange and all its works are constantly being invaded or perverted in consequence of political passions, commercial or financial conspiracies, armaments or, above all, war. At present the growth of direct interferences by government in every department of economic life seems to make nonsense of anything we could recognize as a free play of supply and demand. Despite all this however, the economist persists in his diagnoses and prescriptions, insists upon showing that the elemental motives of reciprocal exchange are still at work, however overlaid by other motives or half-

strangled in restrictions, and he still declares that, if we only dared liberate these natural motives of profit and exchange a little and rely a little more upon them, we should find some saving and pacifying virtue in them. And the economist is right. The economic law that he believes in is not just a fetish : there is a substratum of science in it ; it can show proofs that the exchange motive, lubricated by a money system, does tend to mutual welfare and appeasement. There is moral truth too, in its demonstration that one cannot have it both ways, that one must be ready to lose on the roundabouts if we gain on the swings, ready to " bear his lot and pay his scot " (as the old gildsmen put it). If there has been, in the last three decades, some revolt against the economists, it has been, at least in part, because what they have had to report about the " terms of trade " is less flattering to Western hopes and prospects than what they had to say before. They have now to advise us how to meet losses where before we were pocketing gains : and although economists have been on the whole honestly umpiring the same game all along, malcontent voices have been raised to deny that they know the rules (or even that there are any to know) since our side seemed to be doing less well.

Economists and Agrarians

But in this respect, Christian rural reformers are in the same boat as economists, both labouring against the tide of the times. These agrarians can also claim some basis of science, or at least of sound observation, and they encounter resistance for similar reasons. They do not talk of raising the standard of life (as that is now understood) but of the health of the land itself, the inherent human value of rural living, the need to promote it, to educate for it : to stop the excessive drift of populations to the cities, to increase the number of cultivators and rural communities, to push the margins of cultivable land higher up the hillsides and farther into the swamps—in short, to restore all that our

contributor acknowledges to have been " grossly neglected during the growth of the industrial order ". These are positive motives, if they have quality as well as quantity in view. They should surely be welcomed by economic science, if the inevitable, eventual arrival of Asia's and Africa's technofacturers in the world-markets means that we in Britain will have to do more of our own chores—getting up the coals, growing the food and so forth. Nearly all the signs, from ground-nuts to beef, seem to suggest that we shall. In that case, economist and ruralist should co-operate to the same end—to a general, gentle and gradual recovery of the simplicities of life, so that we may hold our ground: not squandering our achieved standard of life, but making it more moderate and reasonable, in many ways saner and better, whilst our rivals in distant quarters of the globe acquire, also gradually, higher standards of life than they ever had before.

Together, these two kinds of thinkers might do much good. They could, for instance, help the public to realize what is dangerously insular in its present ideas about living standards, equality and security. Only when our people have taken the shock of this discovery will they win through to reassurance in new ways. The picture we have just sketched, of our own standard of life being lowered to meet the rising standards of other peoples half-way, is not of course the only possibility; may turn out better than that, if the wealthy West can justify greater needs by greater contributions of yet higher quality. We need not be too gloomy, provided that, as we have said, both capital and labour in the richer countries admit the necessity of continual change. Their continual adaptation is just what we are going to find so difficult, in a country that exalts " welfare " and practices monopoly as we do now. It is adaptation of mind, first of all, that is required.

INTERIM

Television

On his recent return from the U.S.A. Mr. T. S. Eliot wrote a letter to *The Times* saying that he found most of his American friends alarmed about the effects of television on home life. If there is going to be such an extension of television in Britain as most people seem to expect, he thought we should do well to look into the probable consequences. Some critics were quick to oppose this as just a piece of die-hard opposition to progress. But in the U.S.A., where there are eight million television receivers in use, 107 transmitting stations, and where some study of the social effects has been made, the disquietude that Mr. Eliot reports does not seem to be limited to conservative minds; it is shared by some, at least, who have a vested interest in the growth of the new mass-medium. The valuable Information Service of the American Federation of Churches of Christ (December 16th) gives some curious particulars, notably about the excessive—and apparently persistent—fascination that T.V. exercises over children.

* * * *

That children's viewing is excessive is shown by all the social surveys of television in the U.S.A. In one town children of families with T.V. receivers spent on the average nearly as much time "looking-in" as at school. In what are called "television families", there is a decline in mutual visiting compared with otherwise similar families, the home circle is said to become less conversational and in most cases there is a decline in the reading of all literature except newspapers. The commercial basis of American T.V. is a cause of some of the things objected to—such as the promotion of wrestling shows by advertisers who believe that this attracts women viewers.

It is at first rather difficult to see what all this adds up to, except the trite conclusion that a new medium of mass-communication is ousting older ones. But it has always been necessary, for those who would safeguard personality and spiritual integrity, to be taught, and to learn, how to immunize themselves against mass suggestion. In this country, where the television public is as yet proportionally smaller and the circumstances are in many ways different, we need some informed discussion in good time. Perhaps the British Council of Churches may initiate this?

European Union and Lay Opinion

The attitude of Christians towards the movement for European union was discussed in January by a specially-convened conference of laymen drawn from various churches in several European countries. They found themselves in favour of closer union, and said that the problem was not only a tactical political one, but also a moral and spiritual issue, because the European nations " could not now build up a responsible society unless the area of co-operation was greatly enlarged ". To this affirmative gesture, *The Guardian* (February 9) raised the objection that many Christians will " feel sure that there is a danger that the Churches of one region may be invited to buttress the political development of that particular region in a way not compatible with the Christian vocation to unite all men of good will everywhere and to preach the Gospel in all lands ". Is there any substance in this objection? Has political accord or unification between states that tolerate or encourage the Faith ever proved an obstacle to it of the kind suggested? Surely the reverse is more likely.

* * * *

The inhibitions about European co-operation that are actually felt in the countries concerned are of a less heavenly origin. The best thing about the report of this distinguished if unofficial group is that it proposes a little psycho-analysis of the actual fears and mental resistances that are aroused by the idea of closer unity in each country. There is a list of questions addressed to each people: the French, for example, are asked to ask themselves whether their new European enthusiasm may not be a form of compensation—or even a new way of seeking prestige; Germans, how much of their fear of finding themselves in opposition to their fellows in the East is inspired by a real sense of responsibility, and how much by an assumption that German unity is almost a Divine ordinance. The British are asked whether they can take advice from Continental peoples as willingly and good-humouredly as Americans do from non-Americans. These are random samples from a lengthy questionnaire. A Commission of the sort that drew it up may not be able to get the policy it approves much further; that depends on how far it can engage the interest of the churches concerned. But Christian social study groups can do a good deal to raise the level of discussion about this policy, and they might well make this questionnaire a basis of discussion.

A PLEA FOR ECONOMICS

IT is strange that Christian thought on social matters has so largely ignored the "economic problem", by which I do not mean the various economic problems that have faced the world at various times, but the problem that is involved in all of them, that of "making ends meet", as we colloquially but correctly assert. To the economist his subject is the rationale of means and ends, his problem set by the existence of competing ends for which scarce means are to be employed, his particular competence largely delimited by the sphere to which the "measuring rod of money" applies. Christian moral teaching has been so concerned with the relation of means to ends that it might be thought that theologians, and in particular moral theologians, would have contributed much to a field where the problems of means and ends in a complex society are seriously studied. But it has not on the whole been so, and, though the economist undoubtedly has much blame to bear, so has the Christian social thinker. Here I am more concerned with the failings of the latter.

The problems of "technics" and "technology", for example, are discussed interminably by Christian sociologists without a suggestion that there is any third term between the technical sphere and the sphere of the human being which is the concern of the Christian. These remarks are indeed partly provoked by some examples of this kind of discussion in *The Frontier* for February last year.[1] I do not

[1] i.e. "Few even yet realize the importance of the new technics that have developed since the century began. . . . More than a further extension of the use and elaboration of the power of machines. . . . It consists primarily in the large-scale organization of human actions as means to the same end." (It would be interesting to compare this in detail with the typical "large-scale organization of human actions" that results from the forces of supply and demand in a world-wide economy.) Finally . . . "the issue between man and the latest creation of his spirit, power-technics". (pp. 44–5, 52).

deny the validity of this approach; but it is not the only way to look at the social problems of our time. It implicitly ignores the contribution of the economist, who has the longest, deepest, and most developed tradition in the whole sphere of the social sciences, which the layman who tries to understand the modern world neglects at his peril. To the economist the technology of a period is one of the given factors, one of the means available to satisfy given ends; it exists as a body of knowledge, which may or may not be embodied in a given capital equipment, and is carried in the experience of certain men to be used as required. It is not always clear indeed whether Christians who use this sort of language are aware of the distinction between the technical and the economic problem. The technologist can tell us which is the way to heat a house with the minimum amount of coal; but only the economist can point out to us how to go about deciding which of the alternatives suits us best on the whole, or in other words which is "cheapest". (Money cheapness is not always identical with real cheapness, but only the economist can adequately analyse the divergence).

Strangely enough, in spite of Christian acknowledgment that we live in a world subject to the Fall, many Christian thinkers, and not always those least aware of the implications of the Fall, do not like to admit that we live in a world of scarcity, a world where we have reluctantly to choose between alternative good ends and objects, a world where the avoidance of unnecessary effort and the achievement of "cheapness" are positive virtues. They sometimes seem to think the clue of our problems to be not "All this and Heaven too", but "Heaven and all this too". But in fact the "Age of Plenty", that many once thought, and some still perhaps do think, they live in, was an illusion of a world of unemployment, where needs were certainly not met, but purchasing power was not available in the right places to create effective demand. Then it was possible (up to the point of full employment) to have both guns *and*

butter, because machines and men were idle, in enforced and unwilling leisure—a state of affairs both undesirable and largely avoidable. The scarcity economics, to which we have been used during and since the war, is not the result of the destruction of war—a temporary phase which we shall one day leave behind—though some of its symptoms and its particular scarcities are. It is primarily due to the fact that demand has been up to and above total output, an inevitable phenomenon of full employment and adequate total demand. In that situation, as we know to-day, guns *or* butter and bridges *or* butter become real choices. In fact the world of illusory plenty will never come back again until we are faced again with unemployment due to deficiency of demand. It was a delusion at the best. The real situation (on earth) is that we men are creatures never satisfied with the material riches we possess, ever ready to create new wants the more we have. That is a fact, though it implies criticism of a society that does not set curbs on this inevitable tendency of human nature. But the Christian social thinker will entirely fail to grasp the measure of our problems unless he starts here.

Failures of Christian thinking

Let me give some examples of the kind of failure to comprehend the nature of these issues that occurs in Christian writings. A great deal has been written by Christian sociologists, and much of it of the greatest importance, about the respect due to nature and the land, which have been grossly neglected during the growth of the industrial order. The way of life on the land is extolled as good for its own sake, traditional methods of husbandry are approved because they are in accordance with the natural order of God's creation, and we are told that the following of these methods will make us happier and healthier, and, implicitly, if not explicitly, better off in the ordinary secular sense. It is often implied that a greater proportion of the population

should not merely be living near to the country, or in it, but actually working on the land, though we are rarely told how many, or what proportion. All this may be excellent, but we are never told the cost, which, if we were aware of the real nature of man's relations with nature, his boundless wants and limited means, would be one of the first questions to ask. For the greater the proportion of workers there are on the land, the lower is the standard of living. The achievement of modern agriculture and industrialism is that by multiplying the number of mouths that one worker on the land can feed, more can be released for other occupations and for raising standards in other spheres. The solution of the problems of the undernourished Malthusian areas, such as India and China, is to be found in greater capitalization and the application of modern agricultural techniques, less people on the land, and more people in factories. I am not arguing here against the back-to-the-landers; I can see clear Christian grounds for deliberately advocating a policy of cutting down the standard of living in order that people might live simpler lives working on the land; but the price you would have to pay would be doing without not only tobacco, films, motor-cars, wirelesses and so on, but also complicated hospital services, electricity and drainage supplies, good housing, education, and all the things that a high standard of living means; a low standard of living means more people dying sooner, with more pain. My complaint is that we are never told that these would be the price of redressing the balance of industrialism. It is assumed that we can have "Heaven and all this too".

Again, it appears to be sometimes assumed that the agricultural problem is totally different from the industrial problem, with which economists might be supposed to be concerned. Thus *The Frontier* in April 1950 states that "If the relief of need and necessity is our aim, we must start from quite a different point of view; this is not a power-problem, but a cultural one"; and this attitude is con-

trasted with the attitude of "production engineers".[1] It might however be said to be neither a cultural nor a power problem but primarily an economic problem. For us as human beings what matters is quite simply the serving of our needs with the least use of scarce resources, and particularly that most scarce of all, human labour and effort. And this is a criterion we apply both to the use of power and to the acquiring of bread from the soil. We will not use atomic power (however powerful) if, as seems likely for many years ahead, the labour (and other resources) required to produce electricity from it can produce more electricity from coal. Nor will we use oxen to pull wooden ploughs if we can be more sparing in human effort by using tractors and steel ploughs (after taking into account any possible adverse effects on future production from the same land). (And if we are economists, and not megalomaniacs, we will not forget that tractors also cost human labour to produce . . . a simple fact, but often implicitly forgotten in the current discussions of output per man-shift and production per man-hour.) And if the extra effort required by more primitive methods is extolled as a more satisfying kind of effort, or in some way required by our proper obedience to the Creator, and positively to be striven for, then that can also be taken into account in our calculus. The important thing is to balance all the relevant factors and not leave some out, because they do not fit into simple moral rules or *a priori* judgments.

Another kind of example of neglect of the economic problem is to be found in the way Christians have tried to moralize or theologise the various economic crises we have had to meet after the war. These so-called "crises" have involved a series of complicated technical economic problems, where the solution has lain in a delicate choice among

[1] cf. S.G.'s "Agriculture versus Agri-industry" in the same number, a typical example of the new scholasticism . . . "scholastic" because it imposes its *a priori* categories on the world rather than finding out those appropriate to it.

a bewildering number of "priorities". There has never been the same sort of clear-cut moral issue that sometimes arises in international "crises", such as the Munich crisis. Where Christian leadership would have been helpful would have been in trying to sort out the various priorities, in estimating the importance of full employment (or even overfull employment) and of the various social services and insurance payments, the dilemmas of cheap food versus high taxation and the demands of social justice in equalizing incomes versus the need for incentives, and in assessing our obligations to other less-well-placed countries, and the relative importance of present satisfactions and future demands. This was where guidance was needed rather than in the insipid demands of some Christian leaders and ecclesiastics for national governments or more "national unity", and attempts to point to the underlying spiritual significance of these crises, without even understanding wherein their nature lay.

Some Real Problems

Constructively it might be worth while suggesting some problems towards which Christian thought could be fruitfully directed in this sphere:

(1) How far is the price mechanism the appropriate social mechanism for equating production with the wants of consumers, and in what spheres must it be superseded by direct planning, that is by conscious control by or on behalf of voters or consumers? (The importance of the concepts of choice and responsibility in Christian theology suggests it should have something to say about the embodiment of these in the social mechanisms of the market or the "machinery of democratic planning".)

(2) How far are the possibly conflicting ideals of full employment and economic progress to be reconciled? If hopes of a higher standard of living depend on flexibility and reliance on a larger volume of world trade at the expense

of security of employment and income, which way should we choose? If it is indeed impossible to have at the same time full employment, free wage bargaining and the avoidance of inflation, of which should we prefer to have rather less?

(3) Of what value, after all, is a high standard of living? Does equality of income in any sense embody a Christian standard? And what of our privileged position in relation to the masses of mankind who live lives "poor, nasty, brutish and short" in India and China? (It is strange how often those who assert the vanity embodied in our modern strivings towards higher standards of living, and our attempts to ape American levels, are those who in fact live at a standard which there is no practicable hope that the mass of the people of this country will enjoy for many years even if we make the most tremendous efforts to increase our material wealth.)

(4) What store do we set on future needs at the expense of present demands? And what importance do we give to public expenditure rather than private? Would we for example be wiser to have less to eat and fewer motor cars, and even perhaps less slum-clearance if necessary, so that our cities of the future could be more beautiful and rationally planned?

(5) Finally, what are the appropriate relations between the industrial producers and consumers and those primary producers on whom they depend? How should we set about stabilizing farmers' incomes throughout the world, and what sacrifices are involved for industrial workers and national sovereignty?

Why Christians have gone wrong

The difficulty for Christians largely arises because the problems of the modern world are so often quantitative problems; all economic problems are of this nature, and most of our social problems have an economic aspect, in so far as they involve a balancing of claims upon resources.

Unless this technical aspect is understood, judgments will often be wide of the mark, and this so often happens with Christian judgments, precisely because, while they may be admirably trained in the study of means and ends, Christians have hardly ever applied the study to quantitative problems, and tend to assume that such problems must be simply soluble by the methods of qualitative analysis that would be applied for example to the morals of marriage and the family. The fact is that modern society is not only different from earlier societies, but the factor of scale makes the sphere of economics more important than in former times. Though economics only covers a part of the social scene, there is hardly a social problem that does not involve economics somewhere. It is the economic mechanism, largely the price mechanism, that provides the means that enables our society to function at all on its world-wide scale.

The disorders of a money economy, it would hardly be untrue to assert, cannot be understood by those who have not undertaken the discipline of trying to learn how money works in the modern world. How many Christians, who boldly assert their diagnosis of our ills and proclaim the "ends" to which modern society should conform, could admit that they understand the rôle of money, in even such a comparatively simple matter as the functioning of the banking system? And if it be claimed, as it might perhaps be, that such matters are merely technical, and not of very great importance, it is at least disturbing how often Christians rely implicitly, if not explicitly, on theories about money that do not pass a moment's serious scrutiny. The monetary system and the price system are one of mankind's greatest inventions, like all great inventions capable of being perverted to the most untoward uses, but none the less a great invention. It is only through them that a world society can function at all, and, though a world society as we know it to-day is at least a mixed blessing, it is only through our money system that we can enjoy the standard of living of modern man. It is only through our money

system that we can ensure that production meets the needs of consumers, a matter which Christians often assume to be a simple matter requiring no social mechanism in a complex society, but which is in fact one of the most urgent problems of our day.

It may be said that these are largely matters of means, and that the concern of Christian thought must be with ends. This is fundamentally true, but in the kind of problems with which economists deal, a knowledge of the relevant means is almost essential before one can make useful judgments about ends, and further it is almost impossible to disentangle means from ends. This arises because we are dealing with competing ends in situations where it is not a question whether to kill or not to kill, or to marry or not to marry, but whether a little more unemployment might not be desirable to allow greater flexibility and a possibly higher standard of living, etc., etc. The little less and the little more may make all the difference, and who is to guide us to draw the line among all the manifold possibilities? It is true that the economist may be predisposed to certain solutions by his own sociological conditioning. Until now, economists have very largely taken their colour from the Liberal utilitarian tradition, for historical and other reasons, and the fact that they, alone amongst ordinary citizens, can understand the workings of the price system and admire its beauties (which to others seem perhaps as the workings of a blind fate driving they know not where), predisposes them to solutions of problems which would allow them to continue in their admiration. Hence the fascination, from Ricardo through the Bank Charter Act to Hayek and Harrod in our own day, for "automatic", as opposed to "managed", solutions of problems. However, it is or should be possible for the economist to see where his technical sphere of means comes to its limit, and his prescription involves an "end" of some sort, which he assumes as a citizen. It is, on the other hand, harder for the layman to see where a problem is purely technical and where a judgment depends

on what is really a political assumption. Not that economists should never make political judgments; that would be self-stultifying. The only possible solution is for economists, on their side, to make their assumptions more explicit and for the public to be made more aware of the difference between a technical economic judgment (which may of course be fallible, for much of the application of economic analysis is more nearly akin to the diagnosis of the general medical practitioner than to the experimental certainty of the laboratory worker) and the political and social bias of the economist in question.

Are Christians using their resources rightly?

Those primarily concerned with ends, such as Christian social thinkers, must be aware of the technical factors before they make their pronouncements, or must deliberately avoid these problems, if they are unable to acquire the technical competence necessary. There are various interrelated factors at work here: (1) Christians are ignorant about economic facts partly because they are unaware that economics is within limits a science and that it is impossible to apply the old categories of moral theology directly to the complex social facts of to-day. (2) Those Christians who have directed their attention to these spheres have largely ignored the contribution of serious scholars and directed too much attention to ephemeral utterances or the works of cranks and non-specialists. (3) There has been a disproportionate attention given to the ringside commentator who has intellectually stimulating things to say. This inevitably follows an intellectual attitude that is ignorant of the contribution that the social sciences can make, and does not understand the proper rôle of the expert in this field. (4) For similar reasons, more attention has been directed to sociology as compared with economics than is perhaps warranted by its development as a science and its general importance.

It may indeed be seriously questioned whether Christian resources would not be better used if Christian thinkers about social problems ceased reading their colleagues' prolific and stimulating works about the modern world, and gave more time to first hand study of the facts of that world, or even of the surveys and commentaries to be found in the works of those who devote their lives to the social sciences. It is rare indeed to pick up a book about the relation of Christianity to modern society which shows even a cursory acquaintance with the vast literature written by experts on such subjects as full employment, planning and the price mechanism, money and the trade cycle, international trade, the development of backward areas or indeed the economic history of the last thirty years.

Such serious studies are part of the work of *The Frontier*. And though in some fields they are being undertaken more than one might hope for in view of the resources available, yet in the particular field of economics which, as I have suggested, touches most of the major issues of our time, there is a sad dearth of understanding even among acute and lively minds, and a failure to use limited Christian resources to the best effect.

D. L. MUNBY.

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF WORK

1. *Preliminary Observations*

This document has been prepared at the request of the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, which has called attention to the pressing nature of the problem of *work* in the modern world. The conclusions here stated are not to be thought of as final, and the frankest criticism is invited. They arise out of discussions amongst many groups and in several places. The writer has merely attempted to gather together his own thoughts as they have been moulded in these discussions. He acknowledges his debt to several critics and helpers, too many to enumerate. It should also perhaps be pointed out that this paper deals only with the biblical teaching. Those who have discussed the matter have, of course, had their eyes constantly upon the "existential" situation in Britain (and elsewhere) to-day, but the detailed consideration of such matters does not fall within the scope of this present limited endeavour. Dr. J. H. Oldham's recently published booklet, *Work in Modern Society* (S.C.M. Press, 3s. 6d.) will serve as an admirable "background" study of the modern situation as it appears to the thoughtful Christian mind of our day.

2. *Work as God's Law for Man*

(a) *The Old Testament and Apocrypha.* The basic assertion of the biblical doctrine is that work is neither a "gospel" nor a "curse", but a *law* for human life. Unlike the Greeks, who considered working for one's living to be beneath the dignity of a gentleman, the Hebrews regarded work as a divine command from which no man was exempt. Thus, it is written in the Decalogue: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work" (Exod. 20. 9). The only idle rich of whom we read in the Bible are those who form the object

of the most bitter denunciation of the prophets (e.g. Amos 6). It is highly significant that the later editors of the sacred books did not deem it necessary to expunge the account of Saul's ploughing with his oxen (I Sam. 11. 5) in order to enhance his royal dignity: it does not demean a king to work with his hands. The general standpoint of the Bible is that it is as much a part of the regular order of things as that the sun should rise or that lions should hunt: "man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening" (Ps. 104. 19–23). Honest toil is blessed by God in the abundance of a good harvest or in the prosperity of a nation (Ps. 65), but labour which is not blessed by God is fruitless (Ps. 127). Skill of craftsmanship is a gift of wisdom and understanding from Jehovah: "Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of workmanship, of the engraver and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer . . . and of the weaver, even of them that do any workmanship, and of those that devise cunning works" (Exod. 35. 35). The prudential morality of the Wisdom Literature is full of exhortations to industry and of warnings against idleness: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (Prov. 6. 6). Even though Ben Sira deprecates the deadening effects of manual labour (Ecclus. 38. 25–30) and recognizes that wisdom comes by opportunity of leisure (38. 24), he is well aware that without the labour and skill of artisans "a city shall not be inhabited" (38. 32): and his general attitude is thoroughly biblical: "Hate not laborious work, neither husbandry which the Most High hath ordained" (7. 15). All through the Scriptures work is regarded as a divine ordinance for human life.

(b) *The New Testament.* When we turn to the New Testament, we find St. Paul carrying over into his life in the Church the professional standards which he had learned amongst the Pharisees. It was the rule of the latter that no rabbi should receive payment for his teaching or for his

other professional activities; each rabbi must acquire a trade and support himself and his family by honest toil. Thus, St. Paul was a tent-maker, like Aquila (Acts 18. 3). He continued to follow the rabbis' practice of self-support, even though he held that in principle it was right for the missionary of the Gospel to be supported by the Church, and that there was dominical sanction for such a practice (I Cor. 9. 4–15; II Thess. 3. 7–10; cf. Luke 10. 7). Amongst his converts he found it necessary to teach that Christians are not yet exempted from the ordinance of work: "If any will not work, neither let him eat" (II Thess. 3. 10): doubtless some of them had misunderstood his eschatological teaching, and had assumed that, since they were now living in the New Age, the ordinances of the former dispensation had been abrogated. There are plenty of secular parallels to such an attitude in our own days: those who regard progress in history as leading towards a Utopia in which it will hardly be necessary to work at all are, like the Thessalonians, victims of a mistaken eschatology which tempts men to anticipate a consummation that can lie only outside the historical process altogether. St. Paul discourages on the part of the Thessalonians any attempt to anticipate the Lord's Return: in the period of waiting the ordinances must still be fulfilled, but now they will be fulfilled not as out of obedience to law, but as from a new power of love. This teaching must remain the Christian doctrine of work until world-history comes to an end.

3. *Work as Part of God's Intention in the Creation*

The doctrine of Creation relates God's laws for human life to God's good purpose in the ordering of the world. The laws of God for human life are expressions of the divine intention in the Creation, aspects of the beneficent ordering of the world by the Creator who saw that it was good. Work is just such a law. Sometimes we hear it said that the Bible teaches that work is a curse laid upon humanity as a punishment for sin. Such statements are a distortion of

the myths[1] of Genesis 1–3. The ordinance of work, like every other aspect of the divine law, is good and wholesome: "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous and good" (Rom. 7. 12). The myths of Genesis do not represent work as coming into being as a result of sin, but as a part of the divine intention for mankind even apart from sin. Before the Fall man is created to "replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion" over all living things (Gen. 1. 28), and he is placed in the Garden of Eden "to dress and keep it" (2. 15). From the beginning man is made in the image of God, who Himself is represented as a creator and a worker—the God of whom it was said that "on the seventh day He rested from his work" (Gen. 2. 2 f.). But if we must not speak of work as itself a curse, neither must we speak of work as a gospel. Mr. A. L. Rowse on September 8, 1948, initiated a lengthy correspondence in the London *Times* under the heading "The Gospel of Work": he urged that the press, the B.B.C., the labour leaders, and politicians—significantly he did not add the clergy and ministers—should preach to the people "the Gospel of Work". The people, he said, will respond to being preached to; they always have done all through history: what was needed was to present work to them as a "gospel". It is good to have Mr. Rowse's tribute to the effectiveness of preaching, for though he is an able historian he is not a Christian; but biblical realism will save us from the sentimentalism of talking about work as a gospel and offering it as an opiate to working-men in the vain attempt to persuade them that they like doing something which they know to be burdensome. Work is neither "curse" nor "gospel" but *law*.

[1] A myth is a story which, though perhaps not literally true, nevertheless contains truth about ultimate things and gives it poetic expression that can convey a depth of meaning which could not be communicated by the abstract language of scientific or metaphysical text-books. In this sense we speak of the myths of Creation, the Fall of Man, and so on.

4. *Man's Rebellion against God's Intention: the Fall*

The Bible teaches not that work is a curse but that it is laid under a curse. The curse arises not from the law itself, for the law is good. It arises from man's rebellion against God's good law and from his rejection of the beneficent intention of the all-wise and all-loving Creator. With deep insight the myth of the Fall (Gen. 3) indicates the *cosmic* significance of this rebellion against God and His law. The ground is full of thorns and thistles (3. 18). The story of Cain and Abel significantly follows in Genesis 4. The whole field of man's work, which ought to be the sphere of his glad co-operation under the law of God for the common good, has become the scene of bitter rivalry, fratricidal quarrelling and sordid self-seeking. The world of labour, so far from being the happy workshop of the commonwealth of mankind, is disarranged in consequence of man's sin, and God's good purpose in the creation is frustrated. The biblical myth implies that the bitterness, drudgery and wretchedness of man's workaday life is the result of his rebellion. It therefore discourages the suggestion that Utopia can be reached by any merely social, political or technological advances. There is a fundamental enmity between man and God, and therefore between man and man. A cosmic disarrangement of the order of things has taken place: "Cursed be the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3. 17–19). The reign of death has been substituted for the ordinances of life.

5. *Man Resists but cannot Evade the Ordinance of Work*

Man's rebellion does not cancel the power of law. However much he rebels, man is still subject to the divine law. He cannot escape from its authority into an area of life

where the law of God does not operate. The law is like the "rod and staff" in the hands of the Good Shepherd, who will not let man go. God's law comes to every man in his conscience, even though he rebels against it; it is the means which God uses for bringing back the rebellious sheep to his fold. The consequence of man's disobedience to God's law is that work, which ought to have been a congenial and satisfying human activity, has become a discipline and a task to be endured under the sanctions of force or fear, or under the stimuli of profit or reward. Man is unfit to live in paradise, and the cherubim "with the flame of a sword" bar his return thither (Gen. 3. 24). Man's perennial illusion that he can by his science or his technology find his own way back into a workless paradise results from his disobedience: sin is a potent cause of ideological illusion. God's law will stand until the end of history: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work." Of course, this commandment need not be taken in a woodenly literalistic way as a condemnation of the five-day week; but it does surely mean that an honest week's work is every man's duty. The eternal law of God cannot be replaced by any modern substitutes. Man's predicament consists in the fact that he stands under a law of work which he cannot fulfil as he ought: his heart is rebellious, and the labours of his hands turn to his wretchedness and destruction, instead of becoming an acceptable offering laid upon the altar of God.

6. *Christ the Fulfilment of the Law of Work*

What man could not himself do, God as man has done in Christ. This is the Gospel of the New Testament, and the Church's proper "Gospel of Work". Christ fulfils the law, in respect of work as of other ordinances. It is of the deepest significance that Christ worked on earth as an artisan (Mark 6. 3: Gk. *tektōn*, a "craftsman", or traditionally and popularly a "carpenter"). In this as in other

ways the intention of God in the creation was shown forth and accomplished. It is of the profoundest significance for our Christian doctrine of work that God, when for the sake of our salvation He most wonderfully and humbly chose to be made man, was incarnate, not in a king or statesman or general, or even in a philosopher or priest, but in a village workman. A workman's jacket was the only fitting garment for the God whom the biblical revelation had all along represented as Himself a worker: "On the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and . . . He rested from all His work, which God had created and made" (Gen. 2. 2 f.; cf. Exod. 20. 11). In the biblical doctrine of God as Himself the great Architect and Master-Workman of the universe we have the utter antithesis of the view that work is degrading and fit only for slaves. Here too we find the theological justification of the Christian teaching that work is an honourable and necessary ingredient of the good life. The "almighty Maker of heaven and earth" of the creeds of Christendom could have been adequately revealed in human life only by taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2. 7; *doulos*, properly a *born* slave). It was wholly appropriate that the God of biblical faith, when He became man, should have been born into a working-class family and worn on earth a workman's clothes. Christian piety has, quite rightly, loved to dwell upon the picture of Jesus in the carpenter's shop: the Lord who spoke of His "yoke" as easy was the good workman who knew the difference between a well-made and a badly-made yoke which the poor oxen at the plough would have to wear. The parables of Jesus with their down-to-earth realism possess a universal appeal, in part at least, because of their workaday setting, which brings home their meaning to people of all classes and occupations. They illustrate the kingdom or reign of God in terms of the ordinary everyday life and work of ordinary people. God reigns; His law is sovereign; and Jesus shows us, not only in His teaching but in His life, how it must be obeyed on earth as it is in heaven.

7. *The Redemption of Work*

What difference, then, has the coming of Christ made in the sphere of work? To the world outside the Church it is still necessary to proclaim the duty of work as the law of God (or as the law of nature, if "God" means nothing to our hearers). But to those who are "in Christ" there is something further to be said. The Christian gospel speaks of a grace which enables men to fulfil God's ordinances, a love which is the fulfilling of the law. It is not merely that Christ has given us an example, but that He has given us also a means by which our duty may be fulfilled. Were He only our example, Christ would be our despair. True, this miracle of grace is known only to the eye of faith and cannot be comprehended by men outside the Church; yet its effects are seen, or ought to be seen, in the daily lives of Christian workers. At this point we need to work out fully the meaning of *sanctification* in terms of the Christian worker's life. That task would carry us beyond the limits of this paper. The daily work of the Christian must be seen as part of his glad response to the freely justifying grace of God, the offering of his service, skill and strength to the Creator who is now known also as the Redeemer. When in Christ we are re-made in His new creation (i.e. the Church), we are enabled to fulfil the divine intention as we could never do in our own strength. Then our daily work ceases to lie under the curse of disobedience and becomes our free and joyous service. The likeness of God in man becomes most clearly visible as men are through Christ re-made in His image, as they become truly creative, as through skill of brain and hand they share in the creative activity of God and find joy in their work and see that it is good. In creative workmanship men most truly share in God's lordship over the creation; they too become creators —craftsmen, artists, builders, discoverers. The image of God in man, which was defaced by man's rebellion in the Fall, is restored through the redeeming work of Christ. To

share in the task of Christ's new creation is the privilege of man in the Church. The Church's task is to re-make the world according to the pattern of the love of Christ, according to the intention of God in the creation :

> " . . . that, as He watched creation's birth,
> So man, in God-like mood,
> Might of his love create the earth
> And see that it is good."
>
> (RUDYARD KIPLING.)

Or, if we may so put it, the Church has essentially a lay and not merely a clerical vocation ; its redemptive mission must embrace the whole life of man, including the sphere of industry and work. In this way it may be said that the view of Luther and Calvin is a true conclusion from the biblical teaching, namely, that in his daily work the Christian man may (indeed must) find the proper sphere of his sincere and acceptable worship of God. (This may be said, even though we decline to endorse the exegesis which would equate the New Testament idea of " calling ", *klesis*, " vocation ", with one's secular profession, trade, work or avocation, even in I Cor. 7. 20.)

8. *Work as " Liturgy " (Service, Worship)*

There is a splendid ambiguity in the Christian use of the word " service " which involves a profound biblical truth. God's service is not to be narrowly interpreted : it is rendered not only in prayer, but in life, in deed as well as in rite. The faithful service of God in the sphere of work is " liturgy " as truly as is the " divine service " (*Gottesdienst*) in Church. The conception of service which is implied in such phrases as " cabinet minister ", " minister of state ", " civil servant ", or " public service " is one of the finest flowers of a Christian civilization. In Romans 15. 16 St. Paul speaks of himself as the sacrificing priest (*leitourgos*) of the Gospel of God, offering up the oblation of the Gentiles—a verse which brings out clearly the priestly aspect of Christian

liturgy, which can never be far distant from the use of the word in view of its Septuagint associations. By the fifth century A.D. and onwards the word "liturgy" had come to denote primarily the central rite of the Christian Church, the Eucharist. Though the matter is not explicitly stated in the New Testament, it is in the Eucharist that the Christian doctrine of work as service willingly rendered is most strikingly set forth. The biblical doctrine of work is here dramatized. Bread and wine, symbols of the work of our hands, are offered to God, are blessed by Him, and are given back to us as food for our souls and bodies, the very life of God Himself, the body and blood of Christ. Man's offering of himself, including all the labours of his hands, is through the perfect offering of Christ rendered acceptable to God—"a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, your rational service" (Rom. 12. 1). It is not that by our work or "works" we earn God's favour or our salvation, for it is not of ourselves that we have been enabled to keep God's law or to do God's work; it is rather that in Christ we have been made "fellow workers with God", and now our "works" arise spontaneously, as it were, from the faith in Christ by which we are justified. In the midst of the workaday world the Church, the Christian congregation, stands as a priestly body (I Peter 2. 5, 9), offering at God's altar the work of the whole community—including that of those who do not and cannot pray for themselves ("the oblation of the Gentiles", Rom. 15. 16). It is necessary that we should re-think the priestly character of the Church (the *laos*, laity, not the "clergy") and of the Eucharistic sacrifice in relation to the work of the whole world of industry and agriculture, in which the people of God is set as a "royal priesthood".

9. *Work is not Man's Chief End*

One thing more remains to be said. According to the Bible work is a necessary, right and wholesome part of human life. But it is not the whole of it. It may occupy six-

sevenths of man's waking life, but it is nevertheless not man's most important activity or his chief end here-below. The Law of Moses rightly sets work within its proper and subordinate context of worship. It is significant that the ordinance of work is stated in the Decalogue within the framework of the Fourth Commandment: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it" (Exod. 20. 8–11). Man has here upon earth a higher function even than that of work: he is made to share his Creator's rest. Created in the image of God, man is therefore made to share his Creator's work: so also he is made in order that he may enter into the Maker's rest. The prohibition of work upon the sabbath day is a telling reminder that man's chief end is not labour, but "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever". (This teaching is endorsed by our Lord in the story of Martha and Mary: it was Mary who had chosen "the good part", Luke 10. 42.) Man's highest activity upon the earth is the worship of God, but it is the integral relation of work and worship which gives meaning to both: it is in the restful contemplation of work well done *ad majorem gloriam Dei* that man finds on earth his highest blessedness. Man's rest from all his work on the sabbeth day becomes, as the writer to the Hebrews saw, the token of that heavenly rest which remains for the people of God: even now by faith we enter into the rest which belongs to the "last days", which now through faith in Christ have become "To-day" so that we may even now pass into the heavenly places in him: "We who have believed do enter into that rest" (Heb. 4. 3; cf. context, 3. 7–4. 11). Here then is the final vindication of all the work that we do in this life, our assurance that all our toil and struggle possess abiding value: the short "six days" of our working life on earth will be

crowned with that heavenly rest wherein we shall survey our work, and shall see that it is good. "Wherefore, my beloved, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15. 58). And so our consideration of the Bible's teaching about work brings us finally to the threshold of that mystery before which our speaking must give way to silence, the blessedness of the saints who have heard the "well done" of their Master and have been bidden to enter into the joy of their Lord (Matt. 25. 21). From the depths of this mystery perchance we may catch the echo of the voice from heaven which was heard by the prophet John: "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them" (Rev. 14. 13).

ALAN RICHARDSON.

THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING

THERE seem to be two main reasons why what the theologians—with their partiality for long words—call "eschatology" is becoming almost as lively a subject as what the philosophers call "existentialism". On the one hand, for about fifty years students of the New Testament have been trying hard to come to terms with the fact that, so far from looking forward to a long period of slow evolution and progress, it regards the history of the world as moving swiftly and even catastrophically to its climax in "the last things" (Greek, *ta eschata*, hence "eschatology"). Nineteenth-century Christianity succeeded in closing its eyes to this fact. In the hey-day of Queen Victoria's reign James Anthony Froude observed that "amidst the varied reflections which the nineteenth century

is in the habit of making on its conditions and its prospects, there is one common opinion in which all parties coincide—that we live in an era of progress ". It was a natural mistake for Christians to read the New Testament in that happy frame of mind and to take it for granted that their faith fitted in with it nicely. But for many years now New Testament scholars have been driving home the truth that we have got to think in very different terms if we are to understand the outlook and message of Christ and of his earliest followers.

On the other hand, the mounting crisis in world affairs, and the awful possibility not only that our civilization may be doomed to a sudden eclipse but that human existence itself may be entirely blotted out, are making people wonder whether the Gospel of Christ has any sure word of hope for a world in which the familiar saying that " the end of all things is at hand " has suddenly leapt into meaningfulness. Apocalyptic expectations, that used to be dismissed as crude and fantastic, are attracting many sober minds ; the sects that shout them out are said to be sweeping almost like wildfire across the American West,[1] and the ordinary Christian is becoming, if not anxious to know, at least willing to hear, what the theologians have to say about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.

Four recent publications may be taken as evidence of this growing concern among thoughtful Christians with belief about " the last things " and, in particular, about the " second " coming of Christ. First, two books have been produced in England which deal directly with this subject —*In the End, God . . .* by Dr. J. A. T. Robinson (James Clarke & Co., 6s.) and *Behold, thy King Cometh !* a symposium edited by Brother Edward (Canterbury Press, 5s.). Secondly, an English translation has appeared of a larger and more important book which has already made a profound impression

[1] See an article in *Theology*, February, 1950, on " Modern Sects in the American West ".

on the continent and on British students who have read the German or French editions: namely, *Christ and Time* by Professor Oscar Cullmann (S.C.M. Press, 18s.). Last, but not least, the four striking sermons on " The Coming of Christ " which Dr. C. H. Dodd broadcast during Advent were subsequently published in *The Listener* (December 14, 21 and 28, 1950).

The first thing that needs to be said is that " the promise of his coming " is nothing like so simple an idea as naïve believers have imagined. The use of the expression " the second coming " is in fact misleading and had best be given up.[1] It is misleading both because it suggests that we have to reckon with only two comings of Christ, and also because it is easily taken to imply that the final coming or unveiling of Christ will be an historical event on the same plane, and as datable as his coming at the incarnation, and this, to say the least, is highly questionable. Dr. Dodd anyhow emphatically asserts that the final coming of Christ in glory, which the New Testament promises, is to be understood as " *beyond* history, and not as a further event in history, not even the last event ". And Dr. Robinson, who is able in his book to enter into the question more fully, concurs. Professor Cullmann, on the other hand, seems to be evasive at this point, though no one who reads his book will run away with the idea that he is propounding a simple solution of the problem.

Cullmann's main contention is that the Bible takes *time* (duration) with the utmost seriousness, and that the notion of a timeless eternity has been quite unlawfully imported into the Christian faith from Greek metaphysics. It remains to be seen whether British theologians (who are fortunately

[1] It is odd that the contributors to *Behold, thy King Cometh !* who with a moving sincerity and sense of urgency call for attention to the Bible's teaching about the Advent hope, yet with one consent speak of " the Second Coming ", a conjunction of words that occurs nowhere in the Bible !

adept at having things both ways) will be convinced of the justice of this entirely negative attitude to Greek metaphysics; it is doubtful whether they will agree that in the New Testament itself Greek thought contributes nothing to the understanding of the work of Christ. At all events it is not yet an article of faith that there was no providential preparation for the incarnation and the Church's interpretation of it except in the Hebrew or Semitic tradition. If eternal life were as temporal as Cullmann declares it to be, Miss Dorothy Sayers and others who have been refuting Mr. Fred Hoyle's misunderstanding of it would have to think again.

Nevertheless, Cullmann is undoubtedly right in his positive insistence that the Bible requires us to take time, and therefore history, as the line along which God's purpose is being worked out. Time is not, as the Greeks imagined, a baneful circle from which souls can only hope to escape into a timeless eternity. Time is to be regarded as a line which is getting somewhere—which will arrive at last at the Kingdom of God, i.e. at the kingly rule of God over the whole of the redeemed creation, when all things in heaven and earth shall have been brought into subjection to Christ. "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor. 15. 28).

Time belongs to God and not to the devil; it is divided, says Cullmann, into ages or distinct periods. But in this respect there is a difference between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament there are, after the period before the creation, "before the foundation of the world", (*a*) the period which runs from the creation to the coming of the Messiah, i.e. to the new creation that has been necessitated by the calamity and consequences of sin, and that is promised by the prophets, and (*b*) the Messianic age when God's purpose will be perfectly fulfilled and he will reign over his people either on a transfigured earth or in a

new heaven and earth, this final age or period being of limitless duration. On this view the decisive moment which changes everything, or the mid-point, as Cullmann calls it, is that which marks the transition from (*a*) to (*b*). In the New Testament however this scheme is transformed by the realization that, although period (*a*) is still going on, yet in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah has already come, the last age has arrived, and henceforth the midpoint of time is in the remembered past. Christ's sacrifice and victory give meaning to the whole process, and make it certain that God's kingdom will be finally established. Yet although period (*b*) has arrived, period (*a*) in which evil and death are at work, still continues. Hence for Christian faith the remainder of history, these long-lasting last days, have a double or paradoxical character.

" The centre has been reached," says Cullmann, " but the end is still to come " ; and he uses this illustration. " The decisive battle in a war may already have occurred in a relatively early stage of the war, and yet the war still continues. Although the decisive effect of that battle is perhaps not recognized by all, it nevertheless already means victory. But the war must still be carried on for an undefined time, until ' Victory Day '." Christ is already reigning over the world, over the state (or " secular " order) as well as over the Church, but his reign is at present hidden or invisible ; it is in the Church that his victory is acknowledged and borne witness to and is being proclaimed to all nations. For the Christian every moment of time and every opportunity of obedience and service is now lit up by the sense that it has a part to play in the working out of God's purpose which is to sum up and to renew all things in Christ.

There is another very important element in the Bible's attitude to time which also bears closely on our understanding of " the promise of his coming ". There is on the one hand clock-time which ticks steadily and continuously on, and can be measured quantitatively by days and months and years (the Greek word for this is *chronos*, from

which we get the words "chronology" and "chronometer"). On the other hand there is time understood as moments of opportunity each of which has its own distinct quality (the Greek word for this is *kairos*). What is characteristic of the Bible is that it sees time as a series of pregnant moments (this hour, this day, this year) in which God offers men an unrepeatable opportunity of responding to his loving purpose. In every such moment or *kairos* God both judges men for their hard-hearted blindness and rebellion, and also offers them forgiveness for the past and opens up fresh ways of co-operating in his grand design. The central and all-decisive *kairos*, the mid-point in history, is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Then the world was once for all judged, shown up in its true colours; but then also a new way of responding to God in the power of the Holy Spirit, which Christ released into history, was opened up. Henceforth Christians are to see and interpret all the crises or *kairoi* of history in the light of Christ's coming. He comes not only to individuals but to all nations and generations both as their judge and, if they humble themselves beneath his judgment, as their renovator who creates new possibilities beyond human calculation.

Thus Dr. Dodd writes: "When Christ came into the world 1,950 years ago, something quite new entered history, from beyond the frontier of human existence, and the whole outlook for mankind in this world was permanently altered. It put history into a new gear. . . . What came to earth was final and decisive for the whole meaning and purpose of human existence, and we shall meet it again when history has been wound up. But we do not have to wait until then. At the last frontier-post we shall encounter God in Christ; but meanwhile he keeps watch all along the boundary that limits our life on earth, and everywhere his power presses in upon us, from beyond the frontier. Only there seem to be certain crises in history, as there are in the experience of many individual people, when he comes with power. I believe the period we are living through is such a crisis. It is

an open possibility that in our time the power from beyond the frontier will intervene and upset all our calculations."

Christians should be preoccupied now not with speculating about the date and manner of the end of the world or of the final winding up of history (this is the mistake of the adventist sects), but with reading the signs of the present time and with discerning how Christ is coming in this *kairos* as the judge and deliverer of all who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

A great deal more is involved in "the promise of his coming" than it has been possible to take note of in this short article, as readers of the books under review will discover for themselves, and these books themselves leave one with the impression that only the first steps have been taken in a new exploration of the relation between *chronos* and *kairos*, and also between time and eternity. Professor Cullmann's *Christ and Time* is a book for trained theologians, but laymen will find that Dr. Robinson's *In the End, God . . .*, while not suited for reading in bed, opens up many fresh and even exciting lines of thought concerning "the last things". Moreover, his book is marked by a modesty which is not conspicuous in Professor Cullmann's writing. *Behold, thy King Cometh!* contains some good essays, especially Canon Eric Abbott's on "The Spirit and the Bride say Come", but on the whole it is too naïve and skirts round difficulties that should be looked in the face. It is to be hoped that Dr. Dodd's Advent sermons will be republished as a booklet: there could be no better brief introduction to the subject.

A. R. V.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

THE NEW COSMOLOGY

Dear Sirs,

There are two aspects of Mr. Coulson's article " The New Cosmology " which call for comment.

First an omission. The most striking thing about Mr. Hoyle's theory, that matter is being continuously created, is that he can make such an assertion without being ridiculed. The idea is quite foreign to the usual scientific world-picture, and clearly conflicts with well established " laws of nature ", such as that of the conservation of matter and energy. Nevertheless scientists will regard the new theory not as a scandalous contradiction, but as an exciting possibility to be tentatively accepted and explored in hope. Scientists can be very credulous of strange ideas, provided that they come from the right people.

It is amusing to remember that when a theologian makes statements about creation his ideas are readily discounted, perhaps as meaningless, perhaps as contrary to established scientific *fact*, or even as " conjuring tricks played with the order of the universe ". Mr. Hoyle's message for us is that such objections are not rational, but simply symptoms of the rejection of Christianity at a deeper level. It is time to call the bluff. Scientists will accept strange doctrine, provided it appears to be rational, relevant, and fruitful. But they will not admit it!

My second point concerns Mr. Hoyle's ignorance of Christian doctrine. Of the Christian apologists there is this to be said : they all say something different. Suppose Mr. Hoyle set out to look up the theory of Heaven. He would find many interesting suggestions, but no agreed body of knowledge, no standard textbooks, and no " references to the literature ". How different from a scientific theory, which usually commands general acceptance, is supported by adequate exposition, and can readily be traced to the original papers. Little wonder that Mr. Hoyle should lose his way in the realm of the theologian.

What is needed is a clear statement of Christian belief : perhaps a new thirty-nine articles : not another opinion among the many, but published by authority, and commanding wide and official support. Were this to be done, we could justifiably require the pagan critics to know the doctrine ; and what a lot of argument about the wrong

things would be saved! The Christian too would benefit. In the shifting currents of modern thought there seems to be no orthodox belief. He needs a mark to sail by, and if he can to reach.

"A statement commanding wide and official support." But can the theologians agree? If not, it is unfair to chide Mr. Hoyle for his ignorance of the Christian doctrine of Heaven; it does not exist.

F. J. M. Farley.
(*Senior Lecturer in Physics, Auckland University College.*)

Professor Coulson comments as follows . . .

Mr. Farley's first point concerns the fact that I did not discuss Hoyle's view that scientists can introduce a doctrine of creation without being laughed at, whereas non-scientists cannot! He is quite right here and my reason for leaving this out was that I had already dealt with this particular matter in much greater detail in a lecture to the Institute of Christian Education which is being published shortly in their Journal.

The second point that he makes concerns the possibility of a restatement of Christian doctrine in a form that would command reasonably wide assent. I do not think that he is entirely fair in saying that a scientist can look up the literature on a particular topic and get a final view, whereas the religious seeker cannot. For example, if I want to find out what is believed about Empire free trade I shall find a variety of scientific opinions, there being no agreed doctrine in matters of this kind. However I could soon find out the main lines along which the thought of the economists had recently been running and could in fact fairly readily size up the general feeling on this issue. Perhaps that is all that we have any right to expect in matters of Christian doctrine. Thus there would still be certain main lines of thought not necessarily concurrent. I think that anyone who honestly sets to work could get a fairly clear picture of current Christian opinions on any chosen topic, e.g. the doctrine of Heaven, and I think we might reasonably well ask that a scientist like Hoyle should not make *ex parte* statements without getting some sort of information of this kind—and that was really the point that I was making in my article.

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